Have You Seen His Star?

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In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, [2]asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' [3]When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; [4]and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. [5]They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: [6] "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."' [7] Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. [8]Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' [9]When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. [10]When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. [11]On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. [12]And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. (Matthew 2:1-12)

1. Epiphany

Today is Epiphany. Epiphany means "manifestation" or "showing forth." This is the day that we celebrate the revelation of God incarnate as Jesus Christ. Epiphany is commonly known as Three Kings' Day. On Epiphany we remember the visit of the Wise Men to baby Jesus.

The Wise Men are important because the visit of the Wise Men illustrates that Jesus is the king of all kings who came for the Jews and the Gentiles. Epiphany is one of the three principal and oldest festival days of the Christian Church. The other two days are Christmas and Easter.

Why did the early Christians want to remember the visit of the Wise Men to baby Jesus? It is because they believed that the visit was a sign of the divine identity of Jesus.

2. The Visit of the Wise Men

Matthew 2:2 tells us that the Wise Men knew of the birth of Jesus when they saw his star appear. We don't know the exact identity of the Wise Men.

However, they were likely astrologers who looked to the planets and stars to gain special insight into world affairs.

The Gospel of Matthew shares this story to call our attention to God's purposes for the newborn king and the relationship with the Gentiles. These were non-Jewish men but were nonetheless filled with enthusiasm for the newborn king. The men may have had some insight about the Jewish Messiah from the small communities of Jews settled in Persia and Babylon.

The story of the wise men is often depicted with three men. We don't actually know how many people came to visit Jesus, but we get the number three from the three gifts that the wise men brought, gold, frankincense and myrrh. The wise men came bearing gifts asking, "***Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?"***

King Herod, the king of the region, is deeply troubled when he heard of the wise men's quest. Herod could not tolerate having a rival king, especially a "king of the Jews." Herod called all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asks them where the Messiah was to be born. The Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea. Micah 5:2 tells us, "***But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days***." The prophet Micah was a prophet in the seventh century B.C. foretelling the birth of the Messiah.

Matthew points out that the Messiah is not only to rule in Israel, but also to shepherd God's people. Micah 5:4 says, "***he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD***." 2 Samuel 5:2 says, "***It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel***." The Messiah will be the ruler as well as shepherd of his people.

King Herod instructs the Wise Men to return and tell him where the Messiah is. We know that Herod did this to get rid of the young king.

After the wise men depart from King Herod, the star they followed in the East led the wise men to a house in Bethlehem, five miles south of Jerusalem. This is the place where David was anointed by Samuel as King of Israel.

The wise men worship Jesus and bring their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. These gifts were gifts worthy of a king. Some believe the gifts symbolized Jesus' life. Gold would represent Jesus' deity, frankincense the fragrance of his life, and myrrh, his sacrifice and death.

3. The Meaning of Giving Us a New Year

What does the visit of the Wise Men mean for us today? The story of the wise men reminds us that the Jesus is the greatest gift that God could give the world. We all have Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. In the same way, our lives are all gifts that are given by God. A few weeks ago, we have celebrated nine loved ones and close

friends who have passed away last year. These people have returned to their heavenly home. But all of us are still here on the earth.

Why do you think we are still here? We are here because God has a reason for each of us to be here in the new year. God has called us to go into 2019 with a great expectation.

Acts 1:8 reminds us of what our mission in this life is all about. It reads, "***But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth***."

The reason God gives us another year is to be Jesus' witnesses in this world. When the Wise Men saw the star in the sky, they put everything aside and followed after the star to meet the Messiah. In the same way, God calls us to look for the star in our lives. Jesus is calling us to follow after God's plan and share the good news of Jesus.

4. Have We Seen His Star?

In life, it's difficult to talk about something that you haven't seen or experienced. As we go into 2019, we ask ourselves the question, "have we seen the star of Jesus this year?" Just like the wise men, we look to where God is leading each of us this year so that we can follow that leading and encounter the king of our lives, Jesus. We meet Jesus for ourselves and receive the power of the Holy Spirit so that we can be witnesses of who Jesus is.

5. Conclusion

The Wise Men traveled almost two years to see the face of the newborn Jesus. The wise men left everything to follow after the star and meet the newborn king. The trip was at times dangerous and a long road that would require trust in the Lord. Yet at the end of the journey, the wise men were able to meet the Messiah of the world. The wise men worshipped the Lord and gave thanks through their gifts to Jesus. Their hearts were filled with joy. They believed that the people in the world could have hope through Jesus. Do we have the same joy as we encounter Jesus?

6. Application

What happened after the Wise Men met Jesus? I am sure their purpose in life changed. From then on, they became stars reflecting the baby Jesus. They became Jesus' stars to other people witnessing the birth of the Messiah.

When we have a new year, we greet each other saying "Happy New Year." What really makes us happy? Many people think more money, being healthier, promotion, achievement, and more something would make us happy. But I believe that the real happiness is found when we make other people

happy. How can we make other people happy? When we help others to find Jesus, we experience true happiness.

Yesterday we had a memorial service for Bob Yaeger who was a member about 30 years ago. His wife Diane wanted to have Bob's memorial service at Swift Memorial Church. The reason was to invite cadets to come to Christ. She believed that if they experience the presence of Jesus through the memorial service, they would come to church. I was touched by her thoughtfulness. I am sure she will have many spiritual children. Whatever we do, if we can witness the birth of Jesus the Messiah, we will make others happy and we will be happy as well.

Isaiah 60:1 says, "***Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you***." God wants us to shine as little stars. Do you and I want to be one of Jesus' stars? Amen.